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SUBJECT: Honduran Elections: Mayoral Race in Danli Too Close
to Call as Nationals Try to Break Liberal Dominance

REF: Tegucigalpa 2346 and previous

1. (U) Summary: Emboffs met recently with the two leading mayoral candidates from the medium-sized city of Danli in the Department of El Paraiso, Jorge Alfredo Carcamo Flores of the National Party and Luz Victoria Oliva Lovo of the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party has held power for the past 22 years. In the February elections 19,000 people voted in the Liberal Party primary and 9,000 voted in the National Party primary. (There are approximately 180,000 people in the general area of Danli.) Despite the disparity in numbers, the race now appears to be close. Both candidates view similar development issues as the key issues for the election. Mr. Carcamo has been in politics for 24 years, but has never formally held office; Ms. Lovo is new to politics but has worked for the government her entire career. Both believe their party will win. End Summary.

National Party Candidate

2. (U) National Party candidate Jorge Carcamo owns several large farms and holds a degree in agricultural engineering. His platform is based on economic development for the Danli area and improving education. Carcamo's platform and discussion focused on unemployment and more investment in the countryside, moving from subsistence farming to crop diversification and improved irrigation methods. He also seeks improved access to potable water.

3. (U) Improving school infrastructure and increasing the number of young people in schools is an important goal for Carcamo. He stated that 40 percent of local children do not attend any school, and many of them go for the free lunch. He advocates for a public awareness campaign to convince rural parents of the importance of education for their children and for making the school vacation time coincide with harvest time. Women's issues, particularly helping single mothers with children who work on the street, are a priority for him also. In addition, he wants to create a "Virtual Library" for Danli youth to expand their horizons through the establishment of a free Internet program for local youth.

4. (U) Carcamo promotes capacity building and giving the people the resources to address their own issues locally. He believes that the Liberal party is out of touch with the people, and that they do not understand nor have they met the needs of the people. He also believes that previous Liberal Party mayors have been corrupt and would review the books of previous administrations if elected. He wants an accounting of the 40,000,000 lempiras (USD 2.1 million) from taxes given to Danli last year by the national government.

Liberal Candidate

5. (U) Luz Victoria Oliva Lovo is a retired Ministry of Education district director and holds a degree in rural development. Her platform is based on specific plans for development of the Danli area. Quoting from a document written by the economic development NGO FUNDEMON, in part financed by USAID, she spoke of concrete solutions for economic and environmental aspects of regional integration. Interestingly enough, her first statements were that the politicians of Danli had done many studies on what Danli needs, how to improve its situation, but then would ignore the findings and move on to do something different. (Comment: The previous administrations have all been Liberal - her party. End Comment) She advocated the establishment of a local branch of the national university (UNAH - Universidad Nacional Autónoma de Honduras) for technical education to advance local industrialization. She mentioned other possible avenues of technical training, such as the Zamorano Institute for Agriculture - but training for technicians not for engineers. She also focused on capacity building for local residents, including formal and non-formal education for community members. She is especially interested in capacity building of women and advocated that teachers to be better trained in teaching methodology and curriculum

development.

16. (U) Lovo focused on the importance of environmental protection for the area and suggested identifying a specific organically grown coffee niche market which is environmentally friendly produced, and mentioned regional integration with Nicaragua to address environmental protection issues. Lovo also emphasized ecotourism to promote economic development through developing mountain climbing routes with nice haciendas for travelers.

17. (U) She spoke of the strategic position of Danli, emphasizing the importance of connecting the area with roads to select port cities and the borders, providing adequate outlets for Honduran exports.

18. (U) Lovo said she expects fraud in the upcoming election due to irregularities with voter identification. She alleges that the National Registry of Persons (RNP) destroyed the voting certifications of Liberal Party supporters. In addition, she alleged that 1,317 liberal party voter applications were mutilated by the removal of the photos. There is apparently an ongoing investigation.

19. (U) Both candidates said crime and narcotrafficking are not issues in this local election.

10. (SBU) Comment: Both candidates touched on similar issues. Carcamo's issues seemed much more concrete and focused on the actual issues and problems of Danli. He described himself as a campesino and seems to be more enthusiastic than polished. Carcamo's father was in politics for many years and Carcamo has worked for the party for many years. Carcamo believes he has gained a good understanding of the issues. He is practical and appears to have a good grasp of the issues, but he does not have a strong platform on how to solve them. As with many National Party members in this election, he appears confident that he will win.

11. (SBU) Though Lovo is new to politics, she has served in various politically appointed positions. Her background in education and rural development make her a strong candidate. She has macroeconomic solutions to local problems but with a large price tag and a long timeline. She speaks well, is polished and describes herself as part of the pueblo, but she does not appear to be as closely in touch with the area or its people as Carcamo. The numbers from the primary suggest that the Liberal Party will win; however, Carcamo's growing popularity could make this a close race. Interestingly, when asked if she thought she would win, Ms. Lovo was much more hesitant and said that due to the numbers she should win. It will be an interesting contest - especially to see if the general public apathy and the Nationalist Party's ability to mobilize its voters do indeed hand them an upset victory. End Comment.

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